

Powattan House (44711)  
Galveston, Galveston County, Texas

HABS Tex-38

HABS  
TEX.  
84-GALV  
5

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS...

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District # 6 Tex 2  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Birdsall P. Briscoe, District Officer  
4301 Main Street, Houston, Texas.

## POWATTAN HOUSE (HOTEL)

Galveston, Galveston County, Texas 35th &amp; O Sts.

HABS

TEX.

84-GALV

Owner Mrs. Jake Oschmann ~~Vedder~~Date of Erection 1834-1840 *1847 according to Katherine Vedder  
Oct. 19, 1967*Builder John SydnorPresent Condition ExcellentNumber of Stories TwoMaterials of Construction Frame. White pine brought from Maine on sailing vessel.Other Additional RecordsADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS...

Additional Data: Originally built as an hotel and occupied the block bounded by 21 & 22 streets and M & N avenues. There were 24 rooms, each room having a fire place. The hotel was never a financial success and was sold to a Mr. Bolton who first conducted a school for boys and girl in the building, but finding this was not a financial success, he made the building his home for several years. In February, 1881 the building was purchased by the City to be used as an orphanage. When Henry Rosenberg died in 1893, he left the City money for a new orphanage, so the building changed hands again. Mrs. Caroline Willis Ladd purchased the building from the City and moved it to a block of ground between 34 & 35 streets, where she had it divided into three houses. The main part of the house now stands at 35 & O Sts. One part has been destroyed by fire and the third and other remaining part now stands at the corner of 35th & R streets. In 1903 the main part of the building at 35th & O Sts., was purchased by Charles Vedder and still remains in the Vedder family. In 1937 it was the home of the British Consulate. *(ill-1935)*

Originally the structure stood on a foundation ten feet above the ground, but was lowered in 1907 when that portion of Galveston Island was raised by grading. This was at the time when the grade of a large part of the City was raised some five or six feet following the disastrous hurricane of 1900.

Architectural Comment: Even in its present unadorned edition the place has distinct architectural merit. Greek Revival but not clumsy. Inside and outside its details are generally more refined than is usually found. Alterations on the exterior have been handled in the spirit of the original. In restoring the fireplaces inside the work is not so good as exhibited by a pressed brick mantel of a much later date.

TWO 1936

PART OF POWATTAN HOTEL  
Galveston, Galveston County, Texas

Owner George Benst

Date of Erection 1847

Architect John Sydnor

Builder John Sydnor

Present Condition Good

Number of Stories Two

Other Existing Records None

Materials of Construction Frame

Additional Data This is a section of the Powattan House, See Tex-28.  
It is included in this survey only that it is a portion of the above  
building. In its separation from its parent house it has been badly  
treated.

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS...

HAES  
TE  
34 GALV.  
SA-

2/9/37 NW

Addendum to:

Powhatan Hotel  
3427 Avenue O  
Galveston  
Galveston County  
Texas  
as recorded in 1936

HABS No. TX-28

HABS  
TEX  
84-GALV,  
5-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

## POWHATAN HOTEL

An Addendum to:  
"Powhatan Hotel"  
3427 Avenue O.  
Galveston  
Calveston County  
Texas.

Location: 3427 Avenue O, Calveston, Calveston County,  
Texas.

Present Owner: Calveston Garden Club.

Present Use: Historic House Museum.

Significance: This is probably one of the oldest residences in  
Calveston. It is thought to have been erected in  
1847 by John S. Sydnor, an early Calveston mayor  
and auction merchant, and is a good example of  
the Creek Revival style.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Sydnor's house was erected in 1847; it is believed, and was located on the block of ground bounded by Avenues "M" and "N" and 21st and 22nd Streets. At that time the site was removed from the built-up area of Calveston.
2. Architect: Original architect unknown. Remodelling in 1897 was undertaken by W. H. Tyndell, architect.
3. Original and subsequent owners: In 1852 Mrs. Sydnor was using the house as a hotel and advertised it as the Powhatan House. It was described as being within an enclosure of five acres of ground complete with a large flower garden, servants house and good stables. The journey down 23rd Street to the docks required five minutes by the Powhatan Omnibus, a vehicle operated free of charge by the hotel to convey guests to and from the boats.

According to later secondary source accounts, the hotel was a financial failure and the property was then used as a school, then around 1861-65, occupied by a Mr. C. E. Bolton as his

residence. In 1881 it was purchased by the city of Galveston and made into an orphanage, a purpose that it served until 1893 when a new orphan's home was erected.

In 1903 the house was purchased by Charles A. Vedder and occupied by the Vedder family for a number of years.

J. W. Oshman purchased the property in 1935 and then the Forest E. Dyer family became the owners and occupied the building until its purchase in October 1965 by the Galveston Garden Club.

4. Alterations and additions: In 1893, upon purchase by the City of Galveston, the house was moved to its present site. The property, once owned by Gail Borden, was divided into three parts and the structure made into three separate houses.

Based on physical evidence and a small detail drawing located in a Sanborn insurance map-book of 1889, the original orphanage plan consisted of a square. From that map it can be seen that the orphanage consisted of a square two-story wood structure with a double gallery across the front and a small projecting vestibule and balcony on the rear. In addition another two story frame structure adjoined on the left wall and was "L"-shaped with a gallery across the front. A one story frame structure was located on the rear of this wing.

The main house is substantially the same as the building under study here. The left side has been changed very little, but the right side has been extensively redone. It is believed that this occurred during a remodeling in 1897. At that time it was reported in the Galveston News that the architect, W. H. Tyndell, had recently completed three residences for Mrs. Ladd located at 35th Street and Avenue O. The work consisted of alterations and remodeling costing \$12,000 and conversion of an old building into a dwelling at a cost of \$2,000.

The alterations to this structure consisted in removing the present northwest corner room and creating the present polygonal bay, and moving the wall of the southwest corner room in several feet (probably to fit the building onto the site). In the southwest corner of the rear room a corner fireplace was built. Also in this room the windows and window trim were replaced and a beamed ceiling installed. It appears that the fireplaces that are found throughout the house also date from this period.

The structure presently at 35th Street and Avenue R, then, is the end section of the adjoining two story house that originally abutted the present east wall of the main house.

In 1903 the house was purchased by Charles A. Vedder and occupied by the Vedder family for a number of years. In 1907 the grade of the city was raised by pumping in sand from the bay and the space under the house was reduced from nine feet to three. At that time also, a two story kitchen wing was added on the east side of the house.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Very little original documentation has been located on this building. Little is recorded about Sydnor, also, except that he was a progressive mayor in 1846. During his term he was instrumental in erecting the old City Market Building, organizing a Police and Fire Department and establishing a free public school system. Sydnor was an auction merchant by trade and operated one of the largest slave markets west of New Orleans. He also dealt in other merchandise as was the custom of the time. During the Civil War he served as a purchasing agent for the Confederate states and following the war resided in New York City.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Bibliography:

a. Secondary and published sources:

Galveston News, September 1, 1897

Galveston News, January 9, 1927

The Powhatan House, The Galveston Garden Club pamphlet.

Fornell, Earl W. The Galveston Era. University of Texas Press. Austin, 1961. pp. 115, 151.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.  
Director  
Galveston Architecture Inventory  
March 20, 1967.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The house is a two story frame Greek Revival building having an "L"-shape due to the removal of the right front corner room. The building has a flat roof, an east wing and a double gallery supported by fluted mns across the front.

2. Condition of fabric: The fabric is reasonably sound and in good condition. At present it is in need of paint as the old coats are now peeling to the bare wood.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building is 45'-2 1/2" x 38'-7 1/2". The east wing measures 17'-0" x 24'-0". Ceiling heights are 11'-9" on the first floor and 11' above.
2. Foundation: The foundations for the house are isolated brick piers.
3. Wall construction: Walls are frame, with weatherboarding siding except for the north wall sheltered by the front double gallery which is 5 1/4" center-match.
4. Structural system: The structure is a heavy timber braced frame. Sills and joists are timber. All walls are load-bearing.
5. Porches: A double gallery extends across the front, north facade. It is supported by three fluted columns of the Greek Doric order. These columns are complete with proper capitals and abaci. They are 24' in height and made up of wood splines. There are no horizontal joints, and they have a lower column diameter of 2'-6 1/2". There are only twenty-two flutes.

A second floor balcony extends out over the main entrance and is provided with a cast-iron railing, which is undoubtedly a later replacement.

The rear porch, now enclosed on the ground floor, is probably an addition dating from 1897 although there was a porch and balcony originally.

6. Chimneys: There are four brick chimneys, three internal and one external. The latter is located on the west wall of the northwest corner bay and is stuccoed.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The central entrance is characteristic of the Greek Revival style. Both upper and lower entrances are identical with the exception of the transom. The upper transom is standard with five lights while the lower is filled with a lattice-mullion arrangement and numerous diagonal panes. It is probable that this transom dates from 1897.



The transom bars have a cyma-recta molding. Doors are solid wood; six panels with panel moldings on both sides. Flanking them are wood piers with typical antae capitals and three light sidelights with a lower panel of wood.

The upper doorway is trimmed with wood molding. The lower doorway has a cornice and characteristic antae of the style.

The rear doors correspond to those on the front.

- b. Windows: The front facade has an upper window, six-over-six light wood double-hung sash, and a floor-length window directly below, with six-over-six lights and triple-hung. This window also has a classical cornice mold above and is provided with a three-tier of louvered blinds. All other windows have two-tier blinds. The other windows are double-hung wood sash, six-over-six and two-over-two lights.

8. Roof: The roof is flat.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The house was originally the characteristic central hall plan with flanking rooms; two on each side. The two east rooms are largely unchanged whereas the west has been altered. Several feet were removed from the west wall of the southwest room and the west wall of the stair-hall was altered when the northeast room was removed. The upper floor plan is substantially the same.
2. Stairway: The major stair is located in the stair hall. It has a quarter turn at the bottom and the top, with winders and is undoubtedly an 1897 replacement. A rear enclosed stair is in the north wall of the east wing.
3. Floor: The floors are 5 1/4" yellow pine center-match. Those on the second level were grained.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The interior finish was originally plaster. The walls are now papered.
5. Doors: A pair of sliding doors connect the two west rooms. They have six panels and panel moldings. A characteristic cornice is provided over the architrave.

The doors on the second floor are wood, six panels, molded on both sides.

6. Trim: Molded wood trim characteristic of the Greek Revival style is found around all openings. Molded cornices are located above all of the old windows.

7. Hardware: Most of the hardware is modern with the exception of some of the old door hinges.
  8. Mechanical equipment:
    - a. Lighting: Modern electric fixtures.
    - b. Heating: Fireplaces are provided in all of the major rooms. Although they have classical details, such as egg-and-dart moldings, it is apparent that they are replacements of 1897. All are brick and have brick hearths and simple wood mantels.
- D. Site:
1. Orientation and general setting: The building occupies the southeast corner of the northwest quarter of Outlot 62, being the southwest corner of Avenue O and 35th Streets and faces north on 35th Street.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.  
Director  
Galveston Architecture Inventory  
March 20, 1967.

### PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Galveston Survey was jointly sponsored by the National Park Service, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation and the Galveston Historical Foundation Inc., and developed under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). The historical data was written by John C. Garner, Jr., acting as the Director of the Galveston Architecture Inventory. The written data was edited for transmittal to the Library of Congress in the summer of 1980 by Kent R. Newell of the HABS staff. The photographs were taken by Allen Stross in the summer of 1967.